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DE RUEHIT #0607 1901156
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 091156Z JUL 07
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7255
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000607

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: CHALLENGE TO NON-TURKISH SYNOD MEMBERS OF THE
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

REF: A. 06 ISTANBUL 1717

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 0550

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary and comment. Ultra-nationalist attorney Kemal Kerincsiz, citing the Turkish Higher Court of Appeals' (Yargitay) June 26 rejection of the ecumenical nature of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, requested the Governor of Istanbul intervene to block the Holy Synod's July 7-10 meeting because it included six non-Turkish members and was therefore illegal. Additional police stood guard and blocked roads outside of the Patriarchate as early as midnight on July 7 in anticipation of protests that, as of July 9, had yet to materialize. The Synod meeting convened on July 7 and 8 as scheduled and is expected to continue the afternoons of July 9 and 10. The Kerencsiz request is the first example of the types of challenges the Ecumenical Patriarchate can expect to face in the aftermath of the Yargitay's June 26 ruling. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ecumenical Patriarchate authorities confirmed on July 7 that they anticipated protests after ultra-nationalist attorney Kemal Kerincsiz -- previously known for bringing Turkish Penal Code Article 301 (insulting "Turkishness") charges against authors Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak (ref A) -- accused the Patriarchate of violating the Yargitay's June 26 ruling (ref B) against the ecumenical nature of the institution by including six non-Turkish members in its Holy Synod, which was scheduled to meet July 7-10. At least a dozen extra police were detailed to the Patriarchate and two side streets leading to its compound in Istanbul's Fener district were blocked as early as midnight the night before the meeting. The heightened security remained in place by the morning of July 9, though three days into the Holy Synod's four-day assembly, no protests had yet to materialize.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a separate but related development, according to its press officer, the Ecumenical Patriarchate sent the Governor of Istanbul a letter two months ago requesting work permits for its foreign staff. (Note: This does not include the foreign Synod members who only come to Turkey periodically on visitor visas. End note.) Though we have yet to confirm the veracity of his account, the press officer told us that the Governor publicly stated on television that he would not approve the Patriarchate's request and that he would make all foreign staff at the Patriarchate leave Turkey. The press officer added that Kerencsiz claims to have collected over one million signatures on a petition he plans to submit to President Sezer demanding that the Patriarchate be kicked out of Turkey.

14. (SBU) Comment. The press officer's account of the Governor of Istanbul's televised rejection of the Patriarchate's request for foreign staff work permits is puzzling since it should have been picked up by other media sources and we have yet successfully to corroborate it. Though this would seem to be an uncharacteristic reaction by the Governor, it cannot be immediately discounted, particularly if it was presented in the context of a response to a question about the Yargitay's June 26 decision, which will likely haunt the Ecumenical Patriarchate well beyond Kerencsiz's current challenge regarding the Holy Synod. To what extent will largely depend on how the new government -- that takes office after the July 22 election -- interprets the Yargitay's ruling. The absence of a response to Kerencsiz's call to demonstrations may be a positive sign regarding the public's lack of concern over the issue and discredits the assertion that he has collected one million signatures demanding the ousting of the Patriarchate. End comment.

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